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Persian Heritage

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Dear Readers,

"Where is the Editorial?" is what I constantly hear from my staff as the magazine is readied for press. We Iranians are a worrisome lot, aren't we? Often, in my solitude, I wonder why we have this characteristic and why my parents and our generation exist in such turbulent times. Our children, fortunately, are reaping the benefits of our decision to leave Iran, whether by choice or force. We left our motherland with the expectation that Iran and those we left behind would someday secure the same freedom we would experience in America, or do we and are our children's lives less turbulent?

When my family and I arrived in the US, we thought we would instantly become Americans. We believed as we stepped onto American soil that American culture would automatically be absorbed. We thought that the country we left behind and the love we had for it would evaporate into the air and what would remain would only be sweet childhood memories.

How immature were these thoughts? One cannot erase attachments in a day! In fact with each passing day away from "home" we felt more and more Iranian and less American. Our attachment to Iran and our people grew stronger during the infamous hostage taking. We, as parents, walked a fine line. We were faced with an almost impossible task of teaching our children not to hide their Iranian roots, to be proud of where they came and at the same time be comfortable in their new citizenship.

It was at this time that we saw an increase in the formation of Iranian associations. At first they were organized for cultural purposes. With the turmoil of the late 70's and 80's, however, the associations began to become colored with politics. This created the first line of division in our ethnic group.

Iranians who quickly assimilated into American society recognized their high ranking professionally and financially within the American ethnic group arena. While this rank should have been a strength for us, it had a reverse affect. Rather than unifying us, Iranian groups began to divide on the basis of politics, finance, religion and geographical ethnicity. With each year this division has increased, this saddens me and should sadden all of you.

We are quick to boast of the somewhat 30 radio and television stations in our control and the prestigious journals we publish. Yet, I question if the reason we boast is legitimate? Should we be proud of these media agencies who guarantee the viewers will see programming where we attack each other, programming where we tear each other up and shake a fist in each other's face, programming and pages of verbal destruction?

If we can so freely destroy each other in the open, I shutter to think what we do behind close doors. What latent forms of destruction are used by those who have no pages to write or podiums to speak in front of? Again should we be proud of anybody or anything whose mission is to suck the strength from any good achieved by a unified group? NO! We should not and yet we continue to turn a blind eye to these antics because we are entertained.

My fellow comrades, destruction and death are not achieved only by the tangible weapons of knives, guns and bullets. Death and destruction are equally achievable through unconventional weapons such as lies and accusations, weapons that are spread quickly and easily through our community through those who enjoy gossip. Those who operate with these weapons of mass destruction stop at nothing to achieve their mission. Without remorse they attack our families, our friendships and our integrity. We are to blame because we are eager to feed our enemies by giving them our ears and we aid them by repeating this gossip without first seeking the truth.

So many of us seek recognition without recognizing its cost. Why? The answer to this I believe can be found in an incident I witnessed in medical school while in Iran.



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A dear and slightly built friend of mine decided to attend a prominent soccer game within the first two weeks of school. The stadium was packed and we made our way to our seats in an orderly manner. After a few minutes of looking at the crowd I turned to make a comment to my friend. He, however, had disappeared. At the same time I heard the crowd shouting to my right. Two people had engaged in a fight and one of them was my friend. When I saw whom he was fighting I was shocked. It was a young man at least twice his size and weight. When my friend returned to his seat I asked him what happened. He informed me that he had been in school for two weeks and not one had yet recognized his presence. He continued by telling me that he believed today was the right time and the stadium the place to provide him the best opportunity to show himself to his classmates and ladies. Still perplexed I asked him what the other kid did to him to provoke the fight. "Nothing," he explained, "but I knew that if I was able to beat and kick him first that I would be declared the winner, those are the rules of fighting and engagement."

Now I was stunned and responded, "You mean you bullied someone, who did nothing to you, into a fight to become well known on campus? This doesn't make sense, not to mention the fact that this guy could have killed you with one punch." This was of no concern to my friend because he assured me that he knew the crowd would intervene before his opponent could strike a fatal blow.

Today I wonder if my friends' logic had any truth for today I am still amazed by people's actions and reactions all in the

name of recognition. What price are people willing to pay for status? Why are people willing to destroy friendships? Is there no moral or ethical boundary in their path of destruction? My friend was lucky; he successfully calculated his rescue by the crowd prior to any bodily injury. Others, like my friend, may not so successfully choose their time, place and victim. In the end they will find themselves on the losing side of the battle and achieve "infamous" rather than "famous" personal status.

We as Iranian Americans cannot allow anyone or any organizations to gain strength and recognition through such unconventional methods. We as Iranian Americans should not allow ourselves to be bullied into a fight purposely provoked by one with less than admirable intentions. We Iranian Americans must continue to educate ourselves in our decisions of who will lead us in our future. Our decisions must come from evaluating all facts and not those that make a story "interesting."

I hope that we as Iranian Americans cease from choosing the path of recognition of my friend and choose the path where she/he is recognized for legitimate contributions to the community.

In closing I want to thank all of you who contributed to the success of the magazine, your magazine for the past nine years. Your kind words and best wishes have touched me deeply and continue to fuel my flame of love I have for each and every one of you.

Shahrokh Alavi

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THE HOLLY EMPIRE: Who We Are and What We Do

Sasan Fayazmanesh

It is now nearly three years since nine teen young men from Saudi Arabia and Egypt opened the Pandora's Box by attacking the World Trade Center and Pentagon with hijacked planes. But the answer to "why did they do it?" still remains unsettled. "They did it because of what we do," some say. Others contend, "they did it because of who we are." Alternatively, the answers appear as "they hate us for what we do," or "they hate us for who we are."

Those who give the first answer often discuss various US policies in the Middle East in the 20th century. These policies could include such things as:

1) The establishment of the state of Israel on the Palestinian land and the nourishment and protection of this American-European settler state at the cost of the brutalized, outraged, dispossessed, displaced, terrorized, homeless indigenous population of the land;

2) Maintaining corrupt, dictatorial, brutal, oppressive, and, at times, medieval regimes who are friendly to the US and, at the very least, tolerant of Israel, such as the Shah of Iran, Sadat and Mubarak of Egypt, Hussein and Abdullah of Jordan, the Emir of Kuwait, the Saudi family;

3) Having military ties with many of these regimes and even establishing bases in their countries, an establishment that is often viewed by the indigenous people of the region as an insult not only to their independence but to their religious belief and code of ethics and conduct;

4) Allying with some brutal regimes, such as that of Saddam Hussein, or helping to create these regimes, such as the Taliban.

In addition to tallying these kinds of policies, the advocates of "they hate us because of what we do" also point out that if you pose the same question to the natives of the Middle of East, you would get basically the same kinds of answers. The devoutly religious people, however, might add to the answer a thing or two about Islam and how the US-Israeli policies resemble those of the crusaders. Indeed, if one listens to the likes of Osama bin Laden, one hears much of the above com-

plaints wrapped often in a religious cloak.

In sum, the first answer that one gets to "why do they hate us?" is straightforward, nonchalant, and somewhat behaviorist or empiricist in the sense that it relies on what the patient, the native of the Middle East, reveals to be the causes of his or her ailment. This answer, however, is quite rare. It is found mostly in some independent journals and online magazines.

The second answer, "they hate us for who we are," is the predominant one. It appears in the mainstream, corporate media. It is heard in the radio talk shows. It is found in numerous online magazines and websites. It is written by some academics, who have found fame and fortune by writing about "who we are." It is spoken by the US government officials. It can even be found in the 9/11 Commission Report.

Given the large size and heterogeneity of those who advocate "they hate us for who we are," the issue of exactly "who we are" remains mostly unclear. But by putting together bits and pieces of some unintelligible and disparate arguments, we can come up with some basic characteristics of "us." "We" are: people with values and culture, civilized, capitalist minded, democratic and free. In other words, "they" hate us, because "they" are without values or culture, uncivilized, anti-capitalist, and despise democracy and freedom. Another version of this same answer argues that they are envious of our values, culture, civilization, capitalism, freedom, etc.

This widespread answer is not as straightforward and nonchalant as the first. It is somewhat Freudian in the sense that the patient would never divulge these as the causes of his or her ailment. Thus the analysis tries to go beyond what appears on the surface, locating beneath appearances deep-rooted causes, such as envy. These invisible causes, it is believed, will manifest themselves as the patient's symptoms.

The above explanation is, of course, risky and ironic. It is ironic because most of those who advocate this answer, particularly the academicians, usually have

no love for Freud and Freudian analysis. It is risky because, as any good Popperian knows, one can never falsify such explanations and, therefore, they are, at the very best, pseudo-scientific explanations alongside astrology and parapsychology.

The answer is also vague and, by academic standards, nonsensical. For example, any first year college student who takes cultural anthropology would realize that it is virtually impossible to define unambiguously "values" and "culture." Even defining "capitalism" or "democracy" is not easy in a course dealing with economic history or development. Such difficulties, however, do not seem to concern the proponents of "they hate us for who we are," and, as a result, they often fall into numerous contradictions.

For example, "capitalism" is often used by these individuals in the sense of "consumerism." Or, at times, it is understood by them to mean an economic system based on trade or private ownership of means of production. But none of these understandings would explain why Muslims should hate capitalism. After all, Islam originated from the teachings of a traveling merchant who, by profession, could not oppose private ownership of anything, including the means of production. His modern day followers have also nothing against contemporary consumerism. If anything, a look at the Islamic societies shows the same symptoms of commodity fetishism as anywhere else in the world.

Or, take "democracy." From its inception, the term was vague, since the "rule of the people" only meant the rule of a small number of "people" and excluded such "people" as women, slaves and metics. The term is still ambiguous if one engages in a serious analysis of the electoral process in the modern, Western countries, particularly the US. But, again, the advocates of "who we are" are usually not interested in such analyses and understand democracy to simply mean "one man, one vote" or a consensual and representative government. If that is the case, then it is never explained by these individuals why the US is hated most in those countries that are highly dictatorial and, at the same time, closely allied with the US. After all, the 9/11 hijackers originated from Saudi Arabia and Egypt, two brutal dictatorships, whose citizens rightly view their lack of consensual and representative government to be at least partially related to the support of the US for their rulers. In-

deed, the biggest quandary that the US has faced since it claimed that invading Iraq was for the sake of making it democratic, is that the edict of "one man, one vote," or a consensual government, will most likely result in an Islamic government in Iraq, a prospect that, even though highly "democratic," is unacceptable to the US and Israel.

In sum, it is relatively easy to show that the semi-Freudian arguments of the advocates of "who we are" can't hold much water. It is vague and full of hard-to-define concepts; and once the concepts are defined in a popular manner, as is often the case, the arguments usually become internally incoherent and even contradictory. So why do the "they hate us for who we are" crowd stick to such a lame explanation? The answer, once again, goes back to the US and Israeli policies, their aims and objectives, and the architects and propagandists of these policies.

As an empire the US is bound to exercise control over the Middle East and its natural resources. This was accomplished throughout the 20th century by means of indirect control, i.e., through close ties with surrogate regimes, such as the Saudi family and the Shah of Iran. But the 1979 Revolution in Iran, continued Palestinian resistance to occupation and subsequently a former ally, Saddam Hussein going solo, shattered this policy of indirect control and required dealing with the rebels in the region head on. Hence, we got the old-fashioned colonial invasion and direct occupation of Iraq, the brutal and unrestrained attack against the Palestinians by the Israelis, and the continuous attempt to isolate Iran or scare it with military threat.

Israel, on the other hand, is first and foremost interested in the real estate itself, which could potentially stretch, if one goes by the Biblical prophecy, from the "the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates." This aim, Israel has figured, can best be achieved by riding on the back of the giant empire. The result of this alignment of aims is the creation of a modern Holy Empire, an alliance between US and Israel that requires architects and propagandists who would form public opinion and prepare the masses for wars. Such a role in the US has been assigned to numerous think tanks, institutions and groups, such as the American Enterprise Institute, Project for the New American Century, Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Washington Institute for

Near East Policies, Hoover Institution, and many others. The task of these spin-masters and public opinion makers is an old fashioned one: demonize those who resist your aims and objectives.

We see this act of demonizing throughout the history. Indeed, the act is as old as history itself. Herodotus, presumably the first historian, divided the world into the Greeks and the "barbarians." As opposed to the Greek race, the "barbarians," or the "strangers," he argued, are in every respect inferior people. When it comes to thinking, Herodotus writes, the "Greeks have been from very ancient times distinguished from the barbarians by superior sagacity and freedom from foolish simple-ness." Even when it comes to warfare, the "barbarians" are inferior, he contends, since the Spartan king is told by the ruler of Ionia that "the barbarians are an unwarlike people; and you are the best and bravest warriors in the whole world. Their mode of fighting is the following: they use bows and arrows and a short spear; they wear trousers in the field, and cover their heads with turbans. So easy are they to vanquish!"

Similarly, Aristotle, that "giant thinker" of the "Western civilization" who believed "that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right" opens his Politics by stating that "among barbarians no distinction is made between women and slaves, because there is no natural ruler among them: they are a community of slaves, male and female." He then goes on to recount a whole host of inferior traits of the "barbarians," such as the fact that they-as opposed to the Greeks who own private property-have "common property," or are "tyrannical," "despotic," "servile," "have a custom of plunging their children at birth into a cold stream," or "are ready enough to kill and eat men."

Are the above descriptions of the "barbarians" not familiar in the context of the present time? Are they not, almost word for word-except, perhaps, for such things as cannibalism!-the kind of demonizing that the advocate of "they hate us for who we are" use? It is unnecessary to quote other propagandists of the "Western civilization," such as those of the Roman Empire, the British Empire, etc. to prove the point? Suffice it to say that even the most famous, enlightened and respected thinkers of the "Western civilization" could not escape the prevalent and

grotesque images of the victims of the empire and glorified pictures of themselves. In the first few chapters of Adam Smith's famous *The Wealth of Nations* there are, at least, 7 references to the "savages," i.e., the North American Indians, and 15 references to the "civilized" society, i.e., the "Great" Britain.

In the final analysis, the architects and the propagandists of the Holy Empire are doing precisely what has been done for 2500 years by all empires: calling the victims of their aggression "barbarians," "savages," "uncivilized," "undemocratic," etc. to make conquering them easier. But this act of demonizing has certain drawbacks.

First, an empire whose citizens are fed fantasy, and not facts, might be in for a very long and costly war, which could destroy the fabric of its society, both economically and socially. The length of the war and its cost could become so intolerable to the citizens of the empire that they might ultimately prefer capitulation to a state of permanent war. What the modern Holy Empire faces is not a few "terrorists" that can be eradicated, but numerous brutalized "barbarians" living on the periphery that are now adopting a unifying ideology. The ideology is cloaked mainly in religion. But this is not unusual; the ideology of the masses often takes a religious form. As Karl Marx once observed, "Religious suffering is at the same time the expression of real suffering and the protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation."

Ironically, for many oppressed people in the twentieth century it was "Marxism" itself which became a powerful, unifying religion. This was not the esoteric economic and philosophical theories of Karl Marx, but simple ideas that every liberation movement weaved uniquely for itself under the rubric of some unclear "Marxism" to fight colonial aggression and oppression. Now, with the passing away of "Marxism," it is under the rubric of some even less clear "Islam" that the masses of the Middle East are congregating. These masses, these new "barbarians," have very little technology to combat the "civilized" empire. But they are patient, and have time on their side. They can lie in wait and slowly, very slowly, chip away at the empire. In the long run they might even succeed in bringing the empire down to its knees as the Germanic "barbarians," led by Odoacer, made Emperor Romulus

Augustulus kneel down before them or as, in modern times, the "Gooks," led by Ho Chi Minh, made the giant empire take flight from the roof of its embassy. Are the citizens of the Holy Empire willing to put up with such prolonged warfare? Are the economic and social costs of such a war acceptable or tolerable? Is the outcome certain?

Second, as time passes, the effectiveness of repeated propaganda diminishes. It becomes increasingly apparent to everyone, including the citizens of the empire, that no one has a monopoly over "barbarism" and "savagery." The Greek, Roman, and British empires, for example, all showed that they could act more savagely and barbarically than their victims. This has already become apparent in the case of the Holy Empire. We all witness on a daily basis what Coetzee vividly describes as the ruthless empire that sends its bloodhounds everywhere and feeds on "images of sacked cities, rape of the population, pyramid of bones, and acres of desolation." Some of these images have already made their way into the US corporate news by default: the pyramid of naked prisoners at Abu Ghraib; the torture, sadism, rape, sodomy, and hood-

ing of prisoners; the smiling faces of the "civilized" soldiers who get satisfaction from acts of perversion; the torture and humiliation of the prisoners; the terror in the faces of the "savages" facing the bloodhounds of the "civilized"; the grins on the faces of military personnel giving thumbs up next to the rotting corpse of a prisoner, etc.

Other images are hardly ever shown on the US daily news: the invasion of houses in Baghdad or Ramallah in the early morning hours; the shattering of doors; the terrifying men with headgear and assault rifles breaking into private residences; fear in the faces of the occupants; the demolition of houses in Fallujah and Gaza; planes and helicopters attacking civilians; craters left by bombs; blood stained streets; bodies of Iraqis and Palestinians laying in waste in the streets of Najaf and Rafah; the siege of cities; lines of detainees; the cages in the sun designed for unruly prisoners; the dead animals in the zoos of Baghdad and Rafah; the tanks and bulldozers waiting to attack defenseless Palestinian refugee camps before dawn; the bullet ridden walls; giant holes in the bedroom walls; dwellings turned into rubble; Palestinian

women and children sitting with dazed faces on piles of concrete, where their houses used to be; the terrified Iraqis and Palestinians carrying their belongings before the assault begins; the uprooted olive trees with grieving Palestinian women standing in front of the bulldozer, trying to save their livelihood; overflowing morgues; dead bodies wrapped in shrouds; funerals, etc. Indeed, the world has seen, in just the past few months alone, what "civilization" can do. The more time passes, the longer the war, the more we see the real face of this "civilization."

Ironically, one has to say that the answer, "they hate us for who we are," is correct, but there is a catch: "we" are everything that we say "they" are! This solves the puzzle of "why do they hate us?" It resolves the dichotomy and produces a single answer: They hate us for what we do and who we are, since "what we do" cannot be separated from "who we are."

We are the Holy Empire, and we do as we are.

* Sasan Fayazmanesh is a professor of economics at Fresno State University.

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NEW FINDINGS IN ANCIENT AFGHANISTAN

Prof. Nicholas Sims-Williams
University of London

Professor Nicholas Sims-Williams of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, is the leading expert of the Sogdian and Bactrian languages. Following is the text of lecture he gave on the Bactrian documents discovered from the Northern Hindu-Kush, Afghanistan.

Bactrian, the ancient language of Bactria in northern Afghanistan, is unique among the Iranian languages in being written by means of the Greek alphabet — a legacy of the conquest of Bactria by Alexander the Great in the 4th cent. B.C. From this period onwards the Greek language, written in the Greek script, was for a long time the exclusive language of culture and administration in Bactria. When Bactria was overrun by nomadic peoples from the north, its new rulers, the Kushans, at first continued the use of the Greek language for administrative purposes, but soon they came to use the Greek script to write the local language, Bactrian. A crucial moment in the history of this language was the decision of the Kushan ruler Kanishka to adopt Bactrian as the language of his coinage. After the first issues of Kanishka, Greek disappears from the coinage once and for all, to be replaced by Bactrian.

During the first centuries of the Christian era, Bactrian could legitimately have been ranked amongst the world's most important languages. As the language of the Kushan kings, Bactrian must have been widely known throughout a great empire, in Afghanistan, Northern India and part of Central Asia. Even after the collapse of the Kushan empire, Bactrian continued in use for at least six centuries, as is shown by the ninth-century inscriptions from the Tochi valley in Pakistan and the remnants of Buddhist and Manichean manuscripts found as far away as the

Turfan oasis in western China.

Until forty years ago virtually nothing was known of the Bactrian language except for the legends on the coins of the Kushans and their successors. The Kushan coins are inscribed in Greek letters of an angular type, apparently imitating a style of writing used for monumental inscriptions. In principle these legends are not particularly difficult to read, but their content is limited to the names and titles of kings and deities. The coins of the later rulers of Bactria — Kushano-Sasanians, Kidarites, Hephthalites, Turks, and so on — are written in a cursive script, imitating manuscript styles, which has proved much more difficult to decipher. Some tiny scraps of manuscripts in a similar cursive script were also known, but they were too few and too incomplete to offer any realistic prospect of interpretation.

These prospects were transformed in 1957 by the discovery at Surkh Kotal near Baghlan of the first substantial Bactrian inscription. The text, written in the monumental script already known from the Kushan coins, could be read without much difficulty; its interpretation was much more problematic, since the names and titles known from the coins provided only a minimal vocabulary and hardly a hint of the grammatical structure of the language. Nevertheless, the essential points were immediately recognized by W. B. Henning: the text refers to the foundation of a sanctuary by the emperor Kanishka, its abandonment as a result of problems with the water-supply, and its re-establishment by a high official named Nukunzuk in the year 31 of the era of Kanishka, that is, early in the reign of his successor Huvishka.

Several further Bactrian inscriptions have been discovered since that of Surkh Kotal, but most of them are too poorly preserved to add significantly to our

knowledge of the language. However, in 1993 a new inscription of fundamental importance was discovered by chance at a site named Rabatak, not far from Surkh Kotal. The inscription of Rabatak describes events of the first year of Kanishka in words strikingly reminiscent of those of Darius the Great in the inscription of Bisitun. Since Joe Cribb and I have already published a detailed study of this inscription in the most recent issue of *Silk Road Art and Archaeology*, I will limit my remarks to a few of the most important points.

The opening lines refer to Kanishka as "the great salvation, the righteous, just autocrat, worthy of divine worship, who has obtained the kingship from Nana and from all the gods, who has inaugurated the year one as the gods pleased". Then comes the significant statement: "He issued(?) an edict(?) in Greek and then he put it into the Aryan language". In principle, any of the Indo-European languages of Iran or India could be called "Aryan"; but when Kanishka refers to "the Aryan language" he surely means Bactrian, the language of this inscription, just as Darius meant Old Persian, the language of his inscription, when he wrote: "By the grace of Auramazda, I made another text in Aryan, which previously did not exist". It is difficult not to associate Kanishka's emphasis here on the use of the "Aryan language" with the replacement of Greek by Bactrian on his coinage. The numismatic evidence shows that this must have taken place very early in Kanishka's reign, quite possibly in his very first year.

Lines 4-7 of the Rabatak inscription give a list of the chief cities of north India which were controlled by Kanishka. Four of the five names can be identified: Saketa, Kausambi, Pataliputra, and Champa. The wording of the inscription does not make it clear whether Champa is mentioned as belonging to the area ruled by Kanishka or as the first city beyond his eastern border. Even in the latter case, the statement that he ruled northern India as far as Pataliputra is sufficiently striking.

The major part of the inscription concerns the foundation of a temple, perhaps at Rabatak itself, which seems to have been an extensive site. Lines 9 and 10 name the divinities who are to be worshipped in the temple. This list is very intriguing. On the one hand it includes two Zoroastrian deities who are never portrayed on the Kushan coinage. On the other hand, it omits many names which

are well attested on these same coins, such as Ma, the moon, and Ardukhsh, the goddess of plenty. Above the list of Iranian divinities some words have been added in smaller letters, which seem to identify some or all of them with Indian equivalents such as Mahasena and Visakha.

Apparently the temple was intended to contain statues of kings as well as gods. Kanishka lists four kings: Kujula Kadphises his great-grandfather, Vima Taktu his grandfather, Vima Kadphises his father, and himself, Kanishka. This list is extremely informative. In the first place, it bears witness to the existence of two kings named Vima, rather than one. Several inscriptions previously attributed to Vima Kadphises, notably the Bactrian inscription of Dasht-e Nawur, can now be ascribed to his father Vima Taktu. In all probability the coins of the anonymous king Soter Megas "the great saviour", which come between Kujula and Vima Kadphises in the numismatic sequence, should also be attributed to this newly-discovered Vima the First. Moreover, the indication that Kujula Kadphises was the great-grandfather of Kanishka evidently has a bearing on the oft-debated issue of the date of Kanishka. The fact that Kanishka belongs to the third generation after Kujula clearly imposes certain limits on the manner in which the early chronology of the Kushans may be reconstructed. Although I would not go so far as to say that the new facts are only compatible with a single chronological system, it is clear that the solutions previously proposed will now have to be reconsidered.

Lines 14-17 mention the officials charged with executing the orders of Kanishka. Amongst them is a certain Nukunzuk who is probably the same person who was later responsible for the works described in the Surkh Kotal inscription. At Rabatak, 30 years earlier, he does not yet bear the title *karalrang* "margrave" and seems to occupy a subordinate position. The last part of the inscription in which a continuous text can be read contains a wish for Kanishka's health and happiness and perhaps also — if my reading is correct — expresses the hope that his reign may last for a thousand years.

It goes without saying that neither the reign of Kanishka nor that of the Kushan dynasty approached 1000 years. In about 224 A.D. the Sasanians came to power in Iran. Within a few years the Sasanians had also conquered Bactria, which they ruled during part of the following period through

a viceroy known as the Kushan-shah "king of the Kushans", who was often a prince of the Sasanian royal family. Subsequently Bactria was invaded several times by nomads from the north. At different times the invaders are referred to under various names — Chionites, Kidarite Huns, Hephthalites — though it is not entirely clear whether all these names refer to the same or to different peoples. The next arrivals were the Turks, who in the middle of the sixth century allied themselves with the Sasanians to defeat the Hephthalites; and then finally all the local dynasties were swept aside by the coming of Islam and the Arabs.

The history of the period from the Sasanian Kushan-shahs to the arrival of the Arabs is illustrated by a second discovery. In December 1991, I was shown photographs of a newly discovered Bactrian document on leather. The document was inscribed on both sides with 28 lines in cursive Bactrian script, making it by far the most substantial example of cursive Bactrian so far known. The document was clearly a letter, beginning with conventional phrases of address and greeting almost identical to those used in Sogdian letters: "*To your lordship 1,000 and 10,000 times greeting and homage from so-and-so your servant. Having heard that your lordship is healthy I am happy; but I should be still happier if I myself might see your lordship in good health and pay homage....*" To judge by personal names such as Ohrmuzd and Khwasraw, the document belonged to the Sasanian period. Another striking name was *Purlangzin*, evidently meaning "the man with the panther's skin" — a clear reference to the *zin-e palang* of Rustam, one of the heroes of the Persian epic.

One such document was a revelation in itself. But it was as nothing compared to what was to come. Within five years the corpus of Bactrian documents had grown to a hundred, most of which are now in London, in the collection of Dr David Khalili. These documents have passed through the hands of many different dealers and collectors. In most cases there is no record of their original provenance, though a couple of them are said, quite plausibly, to have been found in Samingan. From internal evidence, especially the recurrence of the same names in several documents, it seems clear that most if not all of them ultimately derive from a single source.

Many of the documents are letters,

some of them still sealed and therefore perfectly preserved, others less preserved.

One of the less well-preserved letters is particularly interesting because it mentions a Kushan-shah. This letter can hardly be later than the latter half of the fourth century, when the rule of the Kushan-shahs came to an end. The Kushan-shah here seems to be named as Warahran, though the reading of the name is not quite clear. Since Warahran (or Bahram) was the name of the last Kushan-shah — or the last two Kushan-shahs — known from the coins, the letter probably belongs to the very end of the Kushano-Sasanian period. The sender of the letter was the daughter of a princess named Dukht-anosh, a Middle Persian name which is attested on a seal in Paris. The contents are not yet clear, but concern a eunuch with the remarkable name Dathsh-mareg "servant of the Creator" — a compound of the Bactrian *mareg* "servant" and the Avestan genitive *dathusho* "of the Creator", which was probably used in the Zoroastrian calendar of Bactria to refer to a day dedicated to the Creator.

Another letter is important for two reasons. Firstly, it is written by a representative of the Shahan-shah or "king of kings", the ruler of Iran, and must therefore belong to one of the periods when Bactria was under Sasanian control. Secondly, it is dated, though the era is not specified.

It seems very likely that the era used here is the same as that of the Bactrian inscriptions of the Tochi valley in Pakistan. These inscriptions, written in Arabic, Sanskrit, and Bactrian, contain dates expressed in three different eras. The vital evidence for determining the starting-point of the Bactrian era is provided by two bilingual inscriptions, the first being in Arabic and Sanskrit. The Arabic text is naturally dated by means of the Hijri calendar, which is blessedly unambiguous and enables one to complete the date of the Sanskrit version, which is expressed in an abbreviated form omitting the thousands and hundreds. The second bilingual is in Sanskrit and Bactrian. Again the Sanskrit date is abbreviated; but, if one assumes that this inscription belongs to the same century as the Arabic-Sanskrit bilingual, the missing figures can be reconstructed, giving a date which can be computed as 863 A.D. The Bactrian version is dated with Greek numerals. Helmut Humbach, the first editor of the Bactrian texts, read these numerals as 632. On the

basis of newly-discovered materials I would interpret the last digit as 1 rather than 2, but a difference of one year is of minor significance. In either case, the Bactrian date indicates the existence of an era beginning early in the Sasanian period, in 232 (according to Humbach) or 233 A.D. (accord to me). I am inclined to follow Humbach in regarding this as a "Kushano-Sasanian" era, whose starting-point was probably the Sasanian conquest of the Kushan empire.

Let us return to the Bactrian letter, whose date can be read as 239. If this era began in 233 A.D., the year 239 will correspond to 471 A.D., during the rule of Peroz, who spent much of his reign fighting the Hephthalites and who eventually perished in battle against them. Is it a coincidence that the word preceding the title Shahan-shah in the letter is in fact *Piroz*? Unfortunately the Middle Persian word *peroz* is not only a personal name but also a common adjective meaning "victorious", so that it is difficult to decide whether one should translate "Peroz, the king of kings" or merely "the victorious king of kings".

Only two of the newly-discovered Bactrian documents seem to be religious in inspiration. Both of them are Buddhist texts containing invocations to Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and so on. Unusually, it is written on cloth rather than leather. It is illustrated with two drawings, perhaps representing a Buddha and an ascetic. The text begins with homage to "all the Buddhas" and to five or six named Buddhas ending with the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. Then homage is paid to a series of six Bodhisattvas, followed by the kings of the yakshas, rakshasas, kinnaras, nagas, pishacas, etc. and finally Shakra, the king of the gods, and the "great Brahma". I have not succeeded in deciphering all the names, but the outline of the text is quite clear up to this point. The last three lines are more obscure, but contain a reference to a Buddhist monastery (*vihara*) and a temple.

Apart from a few tears and small holes, some of which appear to have been made deliberately, the document seems to be complete. I suppose it to be a kind of votive offering, which would have been tied to a pole like a banner and fixed in a holy place, or perhaps an amulet.

After the letters, the largest group of texts consists of legal contracts and similar documents: deeds of sale, leases, guarantees, receipts, and deeds of gift. One particularly interesting document — in

fact the earliest of the dated documents — is a marriage contract, in which one woman engages herself to marry two brothers at the same time. The practice of polyandry, discussed by Prof. Enoki Kazuo in his well-known article "On the nationality of the Hephthalites" and here confirmed by first-hand evidence, was apparently typical of the region. Another unusual document, which now belongs to the Institute of Silk-Road Studies here in Kamakura, is a deed of manumission, recording the freeing of a slave in return for the purchase of a substitute.

Unlike the letters and Buddhist texts, legal documents such as these are always dated. So far I know of more than twenty documents with dates ranging from 110 to 549, that is (if we assume that the Bactrian era began in 233 A.D.), from 342 to 781 A.D. This span of more than four centuries covers the Chionite, Kidarite, Hephthalite, and Turkish periods, and extends well into Islamic times. The contents of the documents provide many details against which one can test this chronological framework.

For example, one shows a contract for the sale of land dated in the year 295, which I interpret as 527 A.D., during the period of Hephthalite domination. This agrees well with the statement of the text that the "Hephthalite tax" due on the property has been paid. The format of the document is typical, though this example is exceptionally well preserved. There are two complete copies of the text. One copy is left open to be read. The other is tightly rolled, tied with string, and sealed with five bullae. The first two bear impressions of the fingernails of the vendors; the others are impressed with the seals of three witnesses. Presumably it was intended that the sealed copy should be opened in the presence of a judge in case of a dispute. On the reverse of the document, the names of the vendors and witnesses are written beside the holes for the seal-strings.

In addition to dates, many of these legal documents contain place-names, including the names of the places where they were written. Several documents state that they were written in Samingan, Rob (modern Ruy), Malr or Madr, or Kah (modern Kah-mard). All four places are apparently within the jurisdiction of a ruler who is referred to in many documents as "the *khar* of Rob". On the other hand, Tarmid (or Termez), to the north of the Oxus, and Bamiyan, which is separated from Kah and Madr by a considerable ridge of

mountains, may well have been outside his kingdom. The *khar* of Rob is no doubt to be identified with the Ru'b-khan, the ruler of Ru'b and Siminjan, who helped Qutayba b. Muslim to defeat the Hephthalite rebel Nezak Tarkhan in the year 91 of the Hijra (710 A.D.), as mentioned by the historian Tabari.

I suspect that the title *khar* is an Iranian — but not necessarily Bactrian — dialect form derived from Old Iranian **xshathriya* — "ruler". The true Bactrian form may be *sher*, which is mentioned by Muslim writers as the title of the rulers of Bamiyan, Gharchistan, and other places in the area around ancient Bactria. The ruler of Rob may at times have controlled a wider area than is indicated by the place-names mentioned so far. For instance, in a letter which probably dates from about 480, the *khar* of Rob is addressed, somewhat bombastically, as the "*Hephthalite yabghu, ... scribe of the Hephthalite lords, and judge of Tukharistan and Gharchistan*". Tukharistan is the land to the north of the Hindu-kush, including Rob and Samingan, but covering a considerably wider area; Gharchistan usually refers to the mountainous area to the west of Bamiyan, but since the Bactrian form of the name indicates that it means merely "*the land of the mountaineers*" it is possible that it refers more generally to the mountain areas to the south of Tukharistan.

Yet another document is written in a place named Warnu. This is surely to be identified with the Aornos; mentioned by Arrian as one of the two chief cities of Bactria. According to Paul Bernard and others, Aornos is to be located near Khulm or Tashkurgan, where the valley of the Khulm river, in which Rob and Samingan are situated, opens out into the plain. Since the whole collection of Bactrian documents almost certainly represents the royal archive of the kings of Rob, the mere presence of this document in the archive would suggest that Warnu too formed part of their dominions.

The next document which I would like to describe is a contract for the sale of a slave, which begins: "It was the year 446, the month Ab, the day Wahman, when this sealed document, this purchase contract, was written here in the district of Samingan, at Marogan, the court of the *khar* of Rob". The year 446 should correspond to 678 A.D. By this time Turkish names and titles are common, as can be seen from the witness-list which follows:

"Under the protection of the god Ram-set, the granter of favours, the granter of wishes, the wonderful, who is worshipped here at Marogan, at the court, under the protection of Zhun-lad son of Shabur, the successful, prosperous qaghan, the tapaghlig iltabir, the khar of Rob, and in the presence of Khusaru the tarkhan, and in the presence of Dev-raz, the brave chief justice of the khars of Rob, and also in the presence of the other noblemen who were present there amongst them and who bear witness concerning this matter". This document too was originally sealed with five seals, whose owners are named on the back: remarkably, the seals of the witnesses include that of the god Ram-set, who was presumably represented by his priest. In the same way, other documents include the god Wakshsh, the deified River Oxus, amongst the witnesses.

The text continues: "Now, I, Yaskul, and I, Yezdgird, the sons of Kaw, inhabitants of Khwastu, who are now present here in the district of Samingan, and our brothers and sons, have sold to you, Fanz, and to you, Winamarg, and to you, Pusk, the sons of Bag-mareg, you whose estate is called Gabaliyan, and to your brothers, sons and descendants, a certain boy belonging to us as brothers, this same boy who is called Khalas, for three Persian drachmas, since we are unable to keep him in plenty and famine. So now, may the boy mentioned above belong properly and well to you, Fanz, and to you, Winamarg, with your brothers, sons and descendants hereafter, from now to eternity".

I hope that these quotations may give you a flavour of the legal terminology of these documents — for which, incidentally, one can find many parallels both in documents written in other Central Asian languages such as Sogdian and Turkish, and in the 5th cent. B.C. Aramaic documents from Elephantine in Egypt.

Another document is dated in the Bactrian year 478, that is, 710 A.D., in the month "Second New Year". The document is a deed recording a gift of land and of a slave girl to the god Kamird and his ked or priest, apparently in return for the healing of a member of the donor's family. *Kamird* means literally "head" or "chief"; it is perhaps the god's title rather than his name. The word *ked* is almost certainly the source of the Chinese term, *ji-duo*, older *kej-ta*, mentioned by Xuanzang as the name of the worshippers of Zhun, the god of Zabulistan, to the south of the Hindu-kush. This god was also known in

the kingdom of Rob, as we can see from the name of its ruler in the previous document: *Zhun-lad*, literally "given by Zhun". In that case it is quite likely that *Zhun* is the god referred to by the title *Kamird* "the chief (god)". Perhaps he is the mysterious dedicatee of the cave-sanctuary of Nigar (Dukhtar-e Nushirvan) in the mountains south of Rob?

The donor in the present document, the queen of a ruler with the Turkish name Qutluğ Tapaghlig Bilga Savug "*fortunate, possessing service, wise, beloved*", is also referred to as "the princess of the Khalas". Khalas, which was also the name of the slave-boy in the previous document, probably represents the Turkish tribal name Khalach, of which this would be one of the earliest occurrences.

One of the very latest Bactrian documents is a deed of sale dated in the year 525, that is 757 A.D. A couple of passages in this contract should be pointed out. The first is the series of clauses which describe the rights of the new owners of the property: "*to have and to hold it, to sell it, to give it away, to pawn it, to offer it for rent, to exchange it for another piece of land, to give it for a son's wedding or a daughter's dowry, to make a monastery or temple, to make a *cemetery or *crematorium ...*". Here the Indian term for a Buddhist monastery, *vihara*, is contrasted with the Bactrian word for a "temple", presumably referring to a non-Buddhist shrine. A similar contrast can be seen between the following pair of nouns, both of which may refer to places for disposal of the dead: *laxmig* would correspond to the Avestan *daxma-*, Middle Persian *daxmag*, terms which usually refer to a structure used for the Zoroastrian rite of exposure, but sometimes also to a grave, while *laxshatanig*, if it derives from the root *daxsh-* "to burn", would necessarily refer to a non-Zoroastrian, perhaps Indian, rite of cremation. These terms, together with the numerous theophoric personal names found in the documents, give us a glimpse of the variety of religious belief and practice in this area before the coming of Islam.

The independence of the kingdom of Rob was nearly at an end, however. While earlier contracts had expressed prices in gold dinars or in Persian silver, the latest texts refer to "Arab silver dirhams", which seem to be specified as "locally *current". In addition, the present text refers, for the first and last time, to the payment of taxes to the Arabs. Soon afterwards, Arabic must

have replaced Bactrian as the written language of the area; and indeed, a small number of Arabic documents have come to light, which appear to form a continuation of the same archive.

Although I have only been able to describe a small part of an immense new body of material, I hope that I have said enough to show that it will throw new light on many aspects of the history and culture of ancient Afghanistan. But as yet I have hardly mentioned its importance for Iranian historical linguistics, though for me personally this is its chief fascination.

One document shows a small selection of forms which illustrate the position of Bactrian amongst the Iranian languages. In particular I have chosen forms which show the connection between Bactrian and the languages of the surrounding area: medieval Sogdian and Choresmian; modern Pashto, Yidgha-Munji, and Ishkashmi. Such forms support the conclusion which Henning reached on first acquaintance with the new language that it is "*in its natural and rightful place in Bactria*" and justify his decision to name it Bactrian.

In many cases the new material confirms or contradicts views originally reached on the basis of limited evidence. For instance, Gershevitch's controversial interpretation of *lruh-minan* in the Surkh Kotal inscription as the plural of a putative **lruh-min* "enemy" receives strong support from the contexts in which the later form *druh-min* occurs. It is particularly impressive that the new texts provide examples of many previously unattested Bactrian words whose existence had already been postulated by Martin Schwartz on the basis of their occurrence as loanwords in other languages of Central Asia.

Of course the new texts also attest many forms for which there was previously no evidence at all. For instance, the only verbs in the Surkh Kotal inscription are a few forms of the simple past tense and the present optative. Now one can quote almost complete paradigms not only of these tenses, but also of the present indicative, subjunctive and imperative, and even a few forms of the perfect subjunctive and optative. Some features of Bactrian are quite unexpected, such as the existence of two types of infinitive as in Sogdian and Khotanese, or the tendency to fuse sequences of conjunctions, adverbs, prepositions, and pronouns into complex words such as *o-ta-kald-men* "and then when to us". The fact that many

texts are dated makes it possible to trace historical developments in the language. For instance, in texts of the 7th century and later, where an “l” and an “r” come into direct contact, the “l” changes to “d”, as in the example quoted before: lruh-min “enemy”, later druh-min.

Up to now, Bactrian has been the poor relation amongst the Iranian languages — the one with nothing to give and everything to receive. Now that Bactrian is no longer so obscure, it can start to provide solutions as well as problems [Slide 32]. For example, the traditional translation of Avestan axvareta- by Pahlavi agrift “not taken”, which many scholars have regarded as a mistake, is justified by its Bactrian cognate. Similarly, the meaning of the much-debated Middle Persian term bun-xanag, literally “foundation-house”, is clarified by the corresponding expression in Bactrian, which clearly implies “estate”, that is, “house and lands”. A place-name mentioned by the great Muslim scholar al-Beruni, which modern scholars have emended out of existence, is shown to be correct as it stands. In the infinitive migd “to exchange”, Bactrian even attests an Indo-European root which is apparently not found in any language more closely related than Greek.

The complete elucidation of the Bactrian documents and inscriptions will require many kinds of expertise: in palaeography and epigraphy, in history, historical geography, history of religions, numismatics, sphragistics, Arabic, Turkish, Chinese ... Since no one individual could possibly be competent in so many fields, such a task demands collaboration between scholars in several disciplines. The starting-point for this collaboration must be the decipherment of the text and the drafting of a first, tentative translation. This is the business of the philologist, who employs his linguistic instinct and his knowledge of cognate languages to formulate hypotheses about the meanings of words and the grammatical structure of the language. Without his preliminary work there is in fact nothing for anyone else to study. Philology is a branch of scholarship which some regard as old-fashioned; but I am proud to call myself a philologist and glad to have had this opportunity to describe to you a body of material which so well demonstrates both the necessity and the rewards of philological research.

Article dates from 1997

A STIFLED LIFE

F. A. Sadeghpour

The latest victim of the “Islamic regime of Iran” is a 16-year old girl who was hanged on August 15, 2004 in the streets for “acts incompatible with chastity.” Her name was Ategh Rajabi, a resident of Neka, Mazandaran province. It was reported that she was hanged by the neck in public view.

Rumor has it that she was “mentally unstable.” Still the clergy, who doubled as judge, prosecutor, and executioner passed a ruling that she must be handed a capital punishment, and the deed should be performed in public view so that it would discourage others from voicing dissatisfaction, protest and opposition to the cleric rules.

A STIFLED LIFE

*She had seen sixteen springs, only.
At her tender age, feeling utterly lonely.*

*Should have been in school with her peers.
Not lonely, depressed, and sad shedding tears.*

*Seeking love and joy, found but depression.
Seeking kindness and compassion, found but dark oppression!*

*Discontent, breathless, she loudly complained.
Her voice fell upon a hubristic clergy, she was arraigned,*

*And accused of “acts incompatible with chastity”, hence a harlot!
In a land where no one rules, but a covey of zealots*

*She was condemned to suffer many lashes first.
The accursed young girl was further aspersed.*

*Clergy-judge not even waiting for the morrow,
With no delay, ordered her taken to the gallows.*

*There was no one willing to tie the noose
The clergy himself did the deed with no dues!*

*Suddenly the world stood silent in a darkness wrap.
She is relieved, she is pure, caught in a death trap.*

*Her body was suspended in mid-air,
Her sightless eyes staring down sideways.*

*Broken neck did not allow her to look at heaven
To ask why her tender life was so riven.*

*Her body swayed in the little wind there was,
Whispering about her murderers’ ethos!*

*While the wind coddled her in the air
It seemed a macabre waltz of the pair!*

*Below her, everyone is present, everyone is missing.
The whiskered cobra unsated is still hissing!*

*Woe to us, woe to us, if we stay silent
So that the clergy beast behaves as a tyrant.*

TAJIKISTAN: THE LAND OF ART AND CULTURE



Masoud Mirshahi

The territory of Central Asia, which consists not only of vast expanses of steppeland, deserts, semi-desert with fine seasonal pastures, but also oases, was naturally destined for the development of nomadic cattle breeding. Between the seventh and third centuries B.C., it was inhabited by large number of tribes. Two main forces determined the development of the civilizations of Central Asia at that time. One was the rise of nomadic animal husbandry and the appearance of equestrian nomads; and the other was represented by the growth of agriculture, urbanization and craftsmanship.

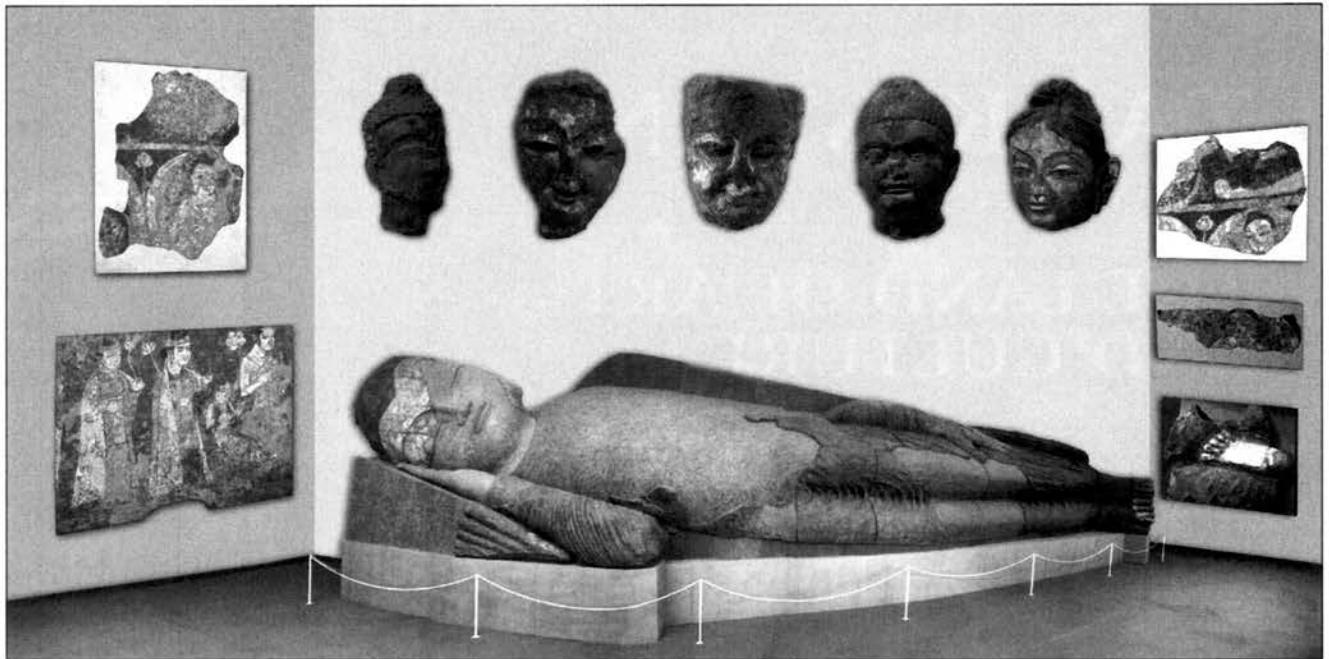
At the beginning of the Early Iron Age, Central Asia advanced from its primeval conditions to the formation of classes and early states based on agricultural and pastoral economy. In the earliest Zoroastrian texts, the Avesta, the regions of Central Asia were listed among the best regions and countries (airyan vaeja). This was the first country in which Zoroaster's teachings spread. The Iranian tribes from Sogdiana, Margiana and Khwarazm formed the first civilization in Central Asia and they, along with the

Sakas, played a major role in the economy and politics of the Achaemenid Empire as a world power. By extending its frontiers up to the Syr Darya River, the Achaemenid Empire annexed part of the steppe zone with several nomadic tribal confederations. In Central Asia, the Achaemenid kings established a well-organized administration, built fortified cities and satrapies. They constructed military roads and developed agriculture with irrigation systems. Iranian nomads supplied their army with horsemen and mounted bowmen and even served in Persian garrisons for their conquest campaigns. After the battles of Cyrus and Darius I against these nomads, their relations became peaceful on the northern frontiers until the invasion of Alexander.

After the collapse of the Persian military resistance in 329 B.C., the troops of Alexander arrived on the Syr Darya River, the frontier between the sedentary and the nomadic civilization, the encounter of the Greeks with the Iranian nomads of Central Asia was of decisive importance for future development. The Greek culture

strongly influenced the Iranian peoples living inside the former Persian Empire. After the disintegration of the Seleucid Empire, the formation of a Graeco-Iranian culture intensified in Parthia and Bactria. The period of the rule of the Great Kushans (ca. A.D. 50 to ca. 233) was the golden age of Central Asia. They controlled the Silk Route which had one branch leading across Karakorum to Gandhara and the port of western India and a main route which ended in the Vakhsh valley from where one branch led to southern Bactria, another QB through Merv to Parthia, and a third to the Caspian and Transcaucasian regions. After the disintegration of the Kushan Empire, Vasudeva II, the king of the Kushans ruling in Bactria, acknowledged Sasanian supremacy and his kingdom became known as Kushanshahr.

The Iranian peoples from Central Asia gave rise to the Persian-speaking Tajiks, who followed a sedentary life quite different from the nomadic Turks and Mongols. It is well known that Tajiks inhabited main cities and fertile valleys of Central Asia for a long time. The region



of Transoxania lying between the upper reaches of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers was frequently invaded, particularly by the Arabs and the Turks who converted the Tajiks to Islam. The Arabs conquered this region in the 8th century, and various Turkic peoples invaded it from the 10th century onwards; the Uzbeks became the rulers of the Tajiks in the 16th century.

The formation of Tajik ethnicity was completed with the foundation of the Samanid State in the 9th century. During this period Tajiks occupied the areas of modern Khorassan, Afghanistan, Transoxania and southern regions of Kazakhstan. Ancient cities of Central Asia, such as Bukhara and Samarkand bear witness, through their monuments, of the magnificence of the Samanid State and the high cultural achievements of the Tajiks.

The Tajiks had a semi-independent existence until the 18th century when the Afghans hived off parts of southern Tajikistan. In the 1860s and the 1870s, the expanding Russian Empire occupied the northern valleys of Zarafshan and Ferghana. Although the Uzbek Emirate of Bukhara recognized the sovereignty of Russia in the 1870s, it kept some independence until 1920, the time when the south was annexed.

Northern Tajikistan was incorporated into the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1918. The Red Army conquered Dushanbe and

other parts of southern Tajikistan which was under the rule of Bukhara in the 1920s, although local nationalistic resistance, the Basmachi guerrillas, from south-eastern mountains was not quelled until 1925. In 1924 the administrative map of Central Asia was redrawn and the state of Tajikistan appeared for the first time on geographical maps after the establishment of Soviet power in that area. It was the first time that an administrative authority called Tajik was established. The Republic of Uzbekistan was also created at that time.

The following year, in January, south-eastern Tajikistan became the Special Pamir Region and in December 1925 it was given the new name of Gorno-

Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast. In 1929 Tajikistan fully became part of the Union of Republics of the USSR and acquired the district of Khojent (the later Lemnabad) from Uzbekistan. In the present time, Tajikistan is a mountainous country with contrasting nature characterized by the variety of its unique landscapes and by a climate either subtropical heat of neighbor valleys or arctic cold of mountain plateaus. The highest mountains of the world, Pamir and part of Tianshan, are situated in this region. The huge range of mountains in Central Asia, the Karakorum, the Kuenlun and the Hinduhush join each other here. The highest mountain peak (Ismail Samani, 7495 m), the highest mountainous salt water lake (Karakul,



height: 3914 m) and the largest glacier (Fedchenko, length 77 km, thickness of ice of about 800 m) are located in this country.

Among the mountain lakes of Tajikistan, the lake of Pamir, the Sarez, was formed nearly 90 years ago when an earthquake caused a massive landslide and deserves close attention, since it could be connected with an ecological disaster. As estimated by professionals, a possible dam breaking of the Sarez lake can result in flooding over an area of 52000 km² inhabited by more than 5 million peoples from Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. It can be not only a disaster for the Central Asian states but also a major ecological problem for the world community.

By becoming an independent state, Tajikistan is actively involve with international political and business life. It shortly became member of many international and regional organizations. With the help of the United Nations, it signed an agreement, the Convention on the peace establishment and national agreement with Tajikistan on 27 June 1997 in Moscow. In April 1998, Tajikistan became a member of Central Asia Economic Committee. At the beginning of 1999 Tajikistan became full member of the Custom Guild of Russia Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan for stimulating prospective international business collaboration.

At present, several dozens of small and average companies working on gold mining, cotton, textile, food production etc. are built or modernized in Tajikistan. Several English, Korean, Canadian, Indian, Chinese, and a number of other foreign companies invested in some fields of the Republic's economy.

The development of literature and sciences, as well as the marvelous people of this country, could be discussed in detail. Much can be said regarding the Republic's talented poets, doctors and its cities where Asian and European architecture is blended naturally, and where handicraft masters preserved and carried out their artistic skills from the ancient times. It is only by visiting this country of Mithra an Zoroaster, the country of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and al-Khwarazmi, country with an everlasting blue sky, a country of mountains covered with snow and blossoming valleys, that one can feel the reality of these impressions. ■

